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LETTER XVII.

JAMES HOWELL, ESQ.* TO THE EARL R—.

MY LORD,—Your desires have been always to me as commands, and your commands as binding as Acts of Parliament; nor do I take pleasure to employ head or hand in any thing more than in the exact performance of them. Therefore, if in this crabbed, difficult, task, you have been pleased to impose upon me about languages, I come short of your Lordship's expectation, I hope my obedience will apologize for my disability. But, whereas your Lordship desires to know what were the original mother tongues of the countries of Europe, and how these modern speeches, that are now in use, were first introduced, I may answer thereunto, that it is almost as easy a thing to discern the source of the Nile as to find out the original of some languages. Yet I will attempt it as well as I can; and I will take my first rise in these islands of Great Britain and Ireland; for, to be curious and eagle-eyed abroad, and to be blind and ignorant at home, (as many of

of his life in Powys, has the following allusion to this ancient city under the Saxon name of Wrecon.

Neu'r syllais o ddinlle Wrecon,

Freuer werydre;

Hiraeth am dammhorth brodyrddé?

Have I not gazed from the high city of Wrecon,

The region of Freuer;

With longing for the guardian of the commonwealth?

Elegy on Cynddylan.

This name of Wrecon is still retained in the Wrekin Hills in the vicinity.—ED.

* This Letter is extracted from a work published in 1645, entitled "*Epistola Hoeliana: Familiar Letters, Domestick and Foreign*, by JAMES HOWELL, Esq." and, perhaps, as having been already in print, it ought more properly to have come under the head of EXCERPTA. However, we are sure, the reader will overlook this little irregularity.—Mr. Howell was a native of Wales, where he was born in 1594. He served in Parliament for Richmond in Yorkshire, and was one of Clerks of the Privy Council both under James I. and Charles I. He died in London in 1666. He appears to have been a man of varied and extensive erudition, in which his Letters abound: they are also particularly interesting for the historical information they contain relating to that age. There are one or two other Letters, concerning Wales, which we mean to transfer to our pages hereafter; and we may possibly draw out a brief memoir of Mr. Howell, from the notices he has left. We are not aware, that any such at present exists.—ED.

our travellers are now-a-days,) is a curiosity that carrieth with it more of affectation than any thing else.

Touching the Isle of Albion or Great Britany, the Cambrian or *Cymraogan* tongue, commonly called the Welsh, (and Italian also is so called by the Dutch,) is, without controversy, the prime maternal tongue of this island, and connatural with it. Nor could any of the four conquests, that have been made of it by Roman, Saxon, Dane, or Norman, ever extinguish her, but she remains still pure and incorrupt; of which language there is as exact and methodical a Grammar, with as regular precepts, rules, and institutions, both for prose and verse, compiled by Dr. David Rice, as I have read in any tongue whatsoever. Some of the authentickest annalists report, that the old Gauls, now the French, and the Britons understood one another; for they came thence very frequently to be instructed here by the British Druids, who were the philosophers and divines of those times. And this was long before the Latin tongue came this side the Alps or books written; and there is no meaner man than Cæsar himself records this.*

This is one of the fourteen vernacular and independent languages of Europe, and she hath divers dialects: the first is the Cornish, the second the Armorican, or that of the inhabitants of Britany in France, whither a colony was sent over hence in the time of the Romans. There was also another dialect of the British language among the Picts, who kept in the north parts, in Northumberland, Westmoreland, Cumberland, and some parts beyond Tweed, until the whole nation of the Scots poured upon them with such multitudes, that they are utterly extinguished, both them and their language. There are some, who have been curious in the comparison of tongues, who believe that the Irish is but a dialect of the ancient British; and the learnedest of that nation, in a private discourse I happened to have with him, seemed to incline to this opinion. But this I can assure your Lordship of, that, at my being in that country, I observed, by a private collection which I made, that a great multitude of their radical words are the same with the Welsh both for sense and sound. The tone

* See Bell: Gall:—lib. 6. c. 13.—ED.

also of both the nations is consonant; for, when I first walked up and down Dublin Market, methought verily I was in Wales when I listened unto their speech; but I found, that the Irish tone is a little more querulous and whining than the British, which, I conjectured with myself, proceeded from their often being subjugated to the English. But, my Lord, you would think it strange, that divers pure Welsh words should be found in the new-found world in the West Indies. Yet it is verified by some navigators; as *grando* (hark), *nev* (heaven), *lluynog* (a fox), *penguin* (a bird with a white head), with sundry others, which are pure British. Nay, I have read a Welsh Epitaph, which was found there, upon one Madoc, a British Prince, who, four years before the Norman Conquest, not agreeing with his brother, then Prince of South Wales,* went to try his fortunes at sea, imbarcking himself at Milford Haven, and so tarried on these coasts. This, if well proved, might well entitle our crown to America, if first discovery may claim a right to any country.

The Romans, though they continued here constantly above 300 years, yet could they not do, as they did in France, Spain, and other Provinces, plant their language as a mark of conquest; but the Saxons did, coming in far greater numbers, under Hengist, from Holstein-land in the Lower Circuit of Saxony, which people resemble the English more than any other men upon earth; so that 'tis more than probable that they came first from thence. Besides, there is a town there called *Lunden*, and another place named *Angles*, whence, it may be presumed, that they took their now denomination here. Now, the English, though, as Saxons (by which name the Welsh and Irish call them to this day), they and their language are ancient, yet, in reference to this island, they are the modernest nation in Europe, both for habitation, speech, and denomination; which makes me smile at Mr. Fox's error in the very front of his Epistle before the Book of Martyrs, where he calls Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, the son of Helen an *English* woman, whereas she was purely *British*, and that

* This must be a mistake, as Davydd, Prince of North Wales, was the brother of Madog, and not Rhys ab Gruffydd, at that time on the throne of South Wales. The writer appears to have gleaned his information respecting the Welsh words in America from Sir Thomas Herbert's Travels, published, we believe, about ten years before.—ED.

there was no such nation upon earth called English at that time, nor above 100 years after, 'till Hengist invaded this island, and, settling himself in it, the Saxons, who came with him, took the appellation of Englishmen.

Now, the English speech, though it be rich, copious, and significant, and that there be divers Dictionaries of it, yet, under favour, I cannot call it a regular language, in regard, though often attempted by some choice wits, there could never any Grammar of exact *syntaxis* be made of it; yet has she divers sub-dialects, as the Western and Northern English; but her chiefest is the Scotick, which took footing beyond Tweed about the last conquest. But the ancient language of Scotland is Irish, which the mountaineers, and divers of the plain, retain to this day. Thus, my Lord, according to my small model of observations, have I endeavoured to satisfy you in part. I shall, in my next, go on*; for, in the pursuance of any command from your Lordship, my mind is like a stone thrown into a deep water, which never rests till it goes to the bottom. So, for this time and always, I rest, my Lord, your most humble, and ready servitor,

Westminster, Aug. 9, 1630.

J. HOWELL.

THE WISDOM OF CATWG.

TRUISMS OF CATWG †.

God will never be displeased at your asking for justice:

God is never the poorer for always giving:

No one goes to Heaven on account of his pedigree or his valour:

Happiness is not the nearer for any man's gaiety:

The wise man will never turn from the right how great soever the difficulty:

* There are five other Letters, relating to the other languages of Europe, but, however interesting, of too general a nature for this publication.—ED.

† Arch. of Wales, vol. iii. p. 6. The three following collections of "Truisms" comprise all the axioms under that title, ascribed to Catwg in the Archaiology.

VOL. III.

30